The Builder.

No. CLXXVI.

SATURDAY, JUNE 20, 1846.

ON Tuesday last, his Royal Highness Prince Albert laid the first stone of the new Laboratories about to be erected under the able superintendence of Mr. James Lockyer, architect, at the back of the house, on the north side of Hanover-square, occupied by the College. The Prince has shewn particular interest in the establishment of this very important Institution, which originated in a conviction felt by many eminent agriculturalists, that, in order to understand the economy of vegetable life, and to place the practice of farming upon a scientific basis,—greater encouragement should be afforded than hitherto to the study of *Organic Chemistry*. Agriculture, medicine, and many collateral sciences, mainly depend upon organic chemistry for their future progress. There is, indeed, scarcely any art or manufacture, which is not susceptible of improvement by the aid of the scientific chemist.

In our own particular department, chemical science is of the greatest importance, and the establishment of a means of advancing it must be regarded with interest. The investigation of the nature of cements and plasters, the composition of pigments and varnishes, the chemical action of one material on another, the effect of atmospheric influences, decomposition, and decay, are some amongst the many instances in which it applies in the science of building. In the application of chemistry to the manufacture of glass, too, and the production of gas, we are considerably interested, and we shall hope to find many young architects, and young engineers amongst the students in the new college. Every facility should be afforded to young men wishing to pursue this study, and strong efforts made to induce greater attention to it, throughout the country, than is now generally paid to it.

A numerous attendance of distinguished men on Tuesday, shewed the interest with which the institution is viewed by those best able to judge of its importance.

The area around the stone was boarded; commodious standings were constructed on either side, and the whole was protected by a huge awning, stretching down to Oxford-street, where the front of the new building will appear.

When the prince had deposited the coins, spread the mortar (in his most approved manner), and set the stone, Mr. Lockyer having previously exhibited the drawing, the Earl of Clarendon addressed his Royal Highness at some length, on the services he had rendered to the institution, and on the advantages which might be expected from its establishment. This institution, he thought, was destined to promote that science the want of which had been long and severely felt by this country, and was daily becoming more apparent. His lordship, after commenting upon the beneficial effects likely to result from the establishment of these laboratories, and the patronage of his Royal Highness, concluded by observing, that he was confident such patronage would stimulate every member and student in the school, to elevate the character of the college by their zeal and assiduity. The noble earl made a very eloquent address: we must, however, take one exception to the tone of it, which would have left the impression on the mind of any person not otherwise informed, that England had no chemists, and had done nothing for chemistry,—an opinion which needs no refutation on our part.

Lord Clarendon having concluded, the Bishop of Oxford ably advocated the institution, maintaining that philosophy and religion had no battle to fight; that the voice of nature (her phenomena) was the voice of God, and that by learning properly to understand that voice, we became better acquainted with his power and goodness.

The prince replied, that it had given him great pleasure to assist in the establishment of the college, as he was satisfied that its operations would tend to advance science, art, commerce, and agriculture. He would always be found ready to give his assistance, and had no doubt that when its objects and intentions were better known, the public would come forward to support it.

The inscription on the stone, as follows, was then read, and the prince departed:—

THIS STONE
WAS LAID BY HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS
PRINCE ALBERT,
FOR THE LABORATORIES OF THE
ROYAL COLLEGE OF CHEMISTRY,
IN PRESENCE OF THE COUNCIL AND MEMBERS,
JUNE 16, 1846.

The new buildings will consist of three laboratories in the basement, ground, and first floors, each being 33 feet by 36 feet in the clear. It is intended when the funds of the college permit, to add other laboratories to those now about to be erected, for which preparation is made in the design. The interior fittings and the ventilation are not yet definitely arranged. As regards the latter, flues will be formed communicating with underground culverts, to be worked either by the furnaces, fan, or shaft. When the building is more advanced, we may revert to this very important part of the arrangement.

The Oxford-street front presents a rusticated basement with doorway in the centre and two semi-circular headed windows on each side. Above is a range of six three-quarter Ionic columns, carrying an entablature with windows in the spaces between them. The front is low, in consequence of a restrictive clause in the lease, and would be improved by the addition of some slightly elevated feature in the centre, above the cornice.

The original tender made by Mr. Grissell amounted to 3,100*l.*, but has been reduced to 2,180*l.*, the funds available for the purpose not justifying a larger expenditure, and for this sum the works will be executed by him.

We repeat our expression of best wishes for the perfect success of the new college; and that it will create a body of scientific chemists, amongst the classes engaged in arts and manufactures, and thus confer extensive benefits on the country. We are glad to find it is provided, that a student who manifests an aptness for chemical research, and who distinguishes himself by diligence, may, after his second session, on the recommendation of the professor, be admitted by the council to continue his studies in the laboratory without the further payment of fees. We hope that arrangements will be made to admit students of humble means; and can hardly avoid thinking with Prince Albert, that when the objects and intentions of the college are better known, the public will come forward to support it.

THE LATE MR. JOHN LE KEUX,

ARCHITECTURAL ENGRAVER.

IT may be safely said, that no English engraver has done more to enhance the fame of his art, and give peculiar interest and value to that branch which he professed and practised for so many years than the late JOHN LE KEUX. Rooker and Lowry had, before the commencement of his career, produced excellent plates, and the latter had practised several novelties and improvements, by the aid of machinery and skilful tooling; but Le Keux not only surpassed those talented artists, but gave to geometrical architectural plates, and subjects of architectural *antiquities* in particular, beauties, effects, and excellences, which were unknown before his time.

It is therefore a gratifying task to put on record some facts and observations on the life and talents of this eminent artist and estimable man, not merely in testimony of his professional merits and personal worth; but of their influence on that peculiar branch of art which he prosecuted with zeal and ability for so many years.

John Le Keux was born on the 4th of June, 1783, in Sun-street, London, where his father was established as a pewterer, and was in the habit of making the common pint and quart pots for publicans. On these his eldest son, John, practised the chaleographic art, by engraving ciphers, names, signs, and devices, for the respective proprietors. In this way he soon became an useful and profitable assistant to his parent, who, to secure his services, had him articled to himself as an apprentice. The father and son were of uncongenial minds; the youth was ambitious, ardent, high spirited, and generous; the parent cold, indolent, and heedless. Such contrarieties could not coalesce, and the former embraced the first opportunity of detaching himself from the latter; and when about seventeen years old, placed himself in the studio of James Basire, who then had in his house several pupils, including Le Keux's younger brother, Henry.* At the time the Le Keuxs were with him Basire was a popular, though not a very skilful engraver. He was extensively employed by Mr. Gough, Mr. Nicholls, and the Society of Antiquaries, for their respective topographical and antiquarian publications; and on their plates his pupils were systematically and almost mechanically engaged. There was little done to arouse their emulation, or to lead to fine and skilful execution. Plate after plate was brought before the public without the least appearance of advancing the style and character of art, or giving novelty and beauty to engraving. The drawings were mostly by Schnebbelie and Carter; the latter of whom produced a valuable and interesting series of plans, elevations, and sections, of the abbey and cathedral churches of St. Alban's, Bath, Exeter, Gloucester, and Durham;—and these certainly afforded much instructive employment to the pupils, and no doubt, were the means of inspiring John Le Keux with a taste for subjects of that character. To quote from a brief notice in the Art-Union,—"refining upon the manner of his master, he formed for himself one combining both truthfulness and taste of delineation, in a degree almost unprecedented;—one equally removed from dry, mechanical, and mere painstaking correctness, on the one hand, and from that sort of freedom which is more spirited than scrupulous, on the other. In almost every production of Le Keux there is striking evidence both of his perfect intelligence of, and his *con amore* sympathy with, the subject; and without them mere exactness of imitation will accomplish comparatively little in architectural drawing;—will at the most give only approximations to what is professed to be described. Such engravers and draughtsmen as John Le Keux and his brother, as Mackenzie and Cattermole, all at once advanced architectural illustration to a rank in art which it had never before reached in this country. The beauties of gothic buildings, previously seen,—so far as regards the representations of them upon paper,—chiefly through the mists and fogs of most wretchedly prosaic engravings, burst forth to view in their real splendour, when lighted up by the warming as well as illuminating rays of taste so flung upon them."

Le Keux remained as a pupil with Basire

* George and William Cooke, and John and Richard Roffe, were also pupils of Basire.